

14 September 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Staff Meeting Minutes of 14 September 1979

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The Director chaired the meeting. []

Lehman reported an Alert Memorandum on Afghanistan is in final coordination and would be forwarded to the Director later today. []

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Taylor complimented Silver on his handouts provided this morning to attendees--summaries of significant cases and actions currently being handled by OGC. []

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Hetu said he believes there may have been some good fallout from recent press focus on intelligence. He said, for example, Ted Koppel (ABC) is reportedly preparing a "primer on intelligence" for T.V. presentation. Hetu said, if done properly, such a feature could help the public to better understand the intelligence process. []

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The Director highlighted his concern regarding the New York Times 13 September article "Soviet Brigade: How the U.S. Traced It" by David Binder (attached). Hetu said the details were probably leaked at an official briefing evolving from the intelligence chronology report on the Cuba situation. The Director said he expressed his concern yesterday to the President and noted David Mark told him such details were not provided by State. Lehman and Silver noted the Binder article also included a leak on COMINT. Discussion followed on how best to deal with this situation and what our approach should be for reporting to the Attorney General under stipulations of E.O. 12036. Hitz said an apparent dual standard within the Executive Branch makes a joke of our assertions to Congressional Committees re leaks. The Director asked Silver to sort it all out and advise him on an approach to the Attorney General. (Action: OGC) []

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Hitz said considerable time was wasted in DCI testimony yesterday before the SSCI on SALT; he said there was a lengthy delay caused by Senators leaving to be photographed. He said also the SSCI Working Group has completed its hearings on SALT monitoring capabilities and there would likely be no more on this until a settling of the Cuba situation. []

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Hitz reported David Sullivan is departing Senator Bentsen's staff, reportedly to take a job in a "think tank." The Director advised May to alert Gambino on withdrawing Sullivan's security clearances; Hitz said he would work with May on this. (Action: DDA) []

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Silver precipitated a brief discussion of next week's luncheon meeting with IOB's Farmer and Kujovich. The Director said he was disappointed--the entire Board would not be there. Mr. Carlucci said he had already done some missionary work toward next week's meeting and urged the Director to attend. []

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Silver said he had seen Mr. Carlucci's notes on a recent discussion with Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Newsom re Agee and described the futile back and forth situation between State and Justice re revocation of Agee's U.S. passport. Mr. Carlucci advised it may be necessary for the Director to speak with Secretary Vance on this, enlist NSC support, but preferably seek direct support of the President. The Director asked Silver to keep pushing on this. (Action: OGC) []

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Dirks reported Iranian Air Force Colonel Jalalai has taken over command of Iran's Electronic Intelligence Command (EIC). He said Colonel Jalalai had been friendly to the U.S. in the past, that he is a very aggressive fellow and Dirks sees this as a good sign. []

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[] reported he is now working with OMB on DoD's 1980 budget supplemental to ensure 3 percent real growth based on ground rules for price changes resulting from inflation. He noted this is an opportunity to gain funds for []. The Director advised we not be bashful in this opportunity and to move as quickly as possible--that we push to fund []. [] noted, nonetheless, that budget erosion will continue due to the rising rate of inflation. The Director asked Mr. Carlucci to work with [] and Taylor on this and be sure the CIAP is not impacted by DoD (GDIP and CCP) budget initiatives in the supplemental. []

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Mr. Carlucci asked that personnel be reminded of today's 1100 hours event in the Auditorium in recognition of Hispanic Heritage Week. Mr. Santiago Rodriguez of Stanford University will speak on "Portrait of a Minority." []

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The Director announced the appointment of Jim Taylor as Associate Deputy Director for Science and Technology and complimented Taylor's substantial contributions of the past. He noted this appointment typifies the broadening of experience he and Mr. Carlucci are striving for in the Agency's top leadership positions. []

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Soviet Brigade: How the U.S. Traced It

By DAVID BINDER

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 12 — The United States Government received indications of the presence of a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba through overhearing the Russian word "brigada" in radio monitoring in 1975 and 1978, intelligence officials said this week.

A year ago, the Carter Administration received information, this time more specific, from radio interceptions, that a Soviet combat force designated as a brigade was garrisoned in Cuba, but it did not pursue the matter, the intelligence officials said.

It was not until the Carter Administration began to worry last spring about Cuban military involvement, through training and arms supplies, in the Nicaraguan revolution and in insurgencies in Grenada and El Salvador that it called upon the intelligence agencies to examine the Soviet military role in Cuba more closely.

How Dispute Developed

In interviews over the last week with officials in the White House, Defense and State Departments, the Central Intelligence Agency and Congress, the emergence of the Soviet brigade as an intelligence problem and a political issue developed in this way:

Surveillance, stepped up in March and April, was intensified again in July and still again in August, ultimately producing what intelligence officials called "confirmatory evidence" — a chance reference in a monitored Russian radio message to a "maneuver" by the "brigade" scheduled for Aug. 17.

On that day, a camera satellite orbiting high over Cuba trained a powerful lens on a small area a few miles southwest of Havana and "sure enough," an intelligence officer recalled, "there was the brigade on maneuver with tanks, personnel carriers and mechanized infantry."

The radio signal had been a Soviet request to the Cuban Army for permission to use the San Pedro maneuver grounds, a few miles west of Havana's José Martí International Airport, to exercise the "brigade" composed of a rocket battalion, a tank battalion and two infantry battalions — totaling 2,300 to 3,000 men.

Well-Camouflaged Area

San Pedro is several miles west of a large Soviet military complex where there is a well-camouflaged storage area as well as a headquarters commanded by a Soviet major general. The mile-square complex, called Lourdes, also includes large dish-shaped radar receiver terminals at a site called Torrens for intercepting communications from American missile tests and from satellites.

On Aug. 20, three days later, other American satellite photographs showed San Pedro empty and military equipment being stowed away at Lourdes. The troops and officers, it was determined, were garrisoned at two military camps nearby — the larger part eight miles east of Lourdes at Santiago de las Vegas, and the smaller one 11 miles to the east at Managua.

However, what began as a rather routine intelligence collection exercise has become a political issue centered on demands for linking the removal of the Soviet troops and approval of the nuclear arms treaty. Other aspects of the dispute involve United States prestige in the hemisphere, Soviet behavior in the overall East-West relationship and the question whether there was an "intelligence failure."

Despite intense concentration in recent weeks by intelligence officials and policy makers, and searching inquiries posed through diplomatic channels to the Soviet Union, many questions remain unresolved.

The Mysteries Remain

Among the mysteries is how long the Soviet brigade has been stationed in Cuba and what its mission is. Last week the Soviet Embassy advised the State Department that a Soviet military advisory group had been in Cuba since 1962, had not changed in size or role and was the only Soviet military formation on the island. This has prompted some American analysts to wonder whether the advisory group has a double mission of training Cubans and forming up as a combat unit on occasion.

As for the suburban Havana facilities at Lourdes, Santiago de las Vegas and Managua, a senior intelligence official said, "We've known about those installations near Havana for years and have changed through the years."

Last week in an interview, Maj. Gen. George J. Keegan, a former Air Force intelligence chief, recalled having seen reports about the Soviet combat force "five or six years ago," but added that at the time he and other Pentagon officials were unable to persuade the State Department or the Central Intelligence Agency to focus attention on it. "We sort of forgot about it," he said.

Last week both former President Gerald R. Ford and his Secretary of State, Henry A. Kissinger, issued statements asserting that they had never seen intelligence reports indicating the presence of a Soviet combat force in Cuba in their time in office, which ended in 1978. According to intelligence officials, the bits and pieces of information assembled on the brigade in earlier years never were submitted to higher levels of the intelligence community, much less to policy makers.

One of the problems appears to have been semantic, since American military specialists repeatedly pointed out that a "brigade" was an abnormality in the Soviet Army and, as one remarked: "We said what should not be can not be."

A Demonstration Brigade?

Now some of the American intelligence experts have begun to speculate that the brigade's primary mission was to demonstrate combat techniques in the brigade configuration of rocket, tank and infantry units used by the Cuban forces in Africa in recent years.

Somewhat parallel to this surmise is the idea that the Soviet unit may well have been in place for more than a decade, but that its "mission changed in the 1970's," as a Defense Department official put it, possibly in support of Soviet utilization of Cuban troops as proxy forces to reinforce leftist governments in Angola, Ethiopia and Southern Yemen.

The intelligence officials are still sifting the mass of signal interceptions, photographs and a few reports from the handful of American agents still available in Cuba, which they have accumulated about the Soviet command structure on the island.

They say there are also looking into files, much of them stored in computers, in an effort to trace the brigade's origins and to determine whether it was separate from the advisory group left over from the 1962 missile crisis. It is a classic intelligence operation in which old pieces of information that had no meaning when they first came to light suddenly acquire significance and help from a pattern of activity that makes sense. "But we still don't know how far back it goes and we're still not sure of all our facts," a top-ranking intelligence official said.

The intelligence officials, from the C.I.A., Defense Department and White House, have struck a defensive note in reviewing the actions that finally led to the discovery of the brigade. They contend on the one hand that they still do not consider it militarily significant and on the other hand that, until recently, they had been too busy concentrating limited technical surveillance resources on other more crucial targets to accumulate adequate information on the Soviet troops in Cuba.

These arguments were carried into hearings begun today by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on whether there was, as some of the panel members asserted last week, "an intelligence failure" surrounding the discovery of the Soviet troops.

"I think our people are very pleased," one Administration official said of the intelligence performance. "It was a team effort."

"Our res- terms," he added in refer- the the ppto satellites. "You can o turn on the birds for so long or they wear out. The Russians know that, too."

As for the San Pedro maneuver discovery, he said it had been made more difficult by the fact that the Soviet Union had "pretty much re-equipped the Cubans so it's harder to tell who is driving the equipment." He said the Russians had also taken unusual measures to conceal their high degree of radio silence.

This official added that a year ago photographic surveillance of the Cuban military was limited to twice a month. Electronic monitoring was also restricted. This was stepped up last month to daily surveillance.

Role of Senator Stone

But just as the intelligence community had spent months and even years looking at the brigade without seeing it, so the Carter Administration's top policy makers also had difficulty facing the issue once the Soviet combat presence in Cuba began to emerge. But they had been given an early warning by Senator Richard Stone.

In January 1978, the Florida Democrat had asked President Carter to state American policy on Soviet military activities in this hemisphere and received a reply, made public at the time, that said:

"In particular, it has and will continue to be the policy of the United States to oppose any efforts, direct or indirect, by the Soviet Union to establish military bases in the Western Hemisphere."

In April, in the midst of the revolutionary activities spreading among Caribbean and Central American countries, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the national security adviser, sent a memorandum asking Adm. Stansfield Turner, Director of Central Intelligence, to start a large-scale study of Soviet military activities in Cuba and Cuban military activities elsewhere.

One result of the study, which is still incomplete, was a report by a National Security Agency analyst of radio interceptions from Cuba that there was indeed a Soviet combat formation stationed near Havana, probably as a "brigade." That report was completed in June.

On July 17, according to Mr. Stone, a Senate staff aide tugged his sleeve as he was about to enter a Foreign Relations Committee hearing on strategic arms and told him about the National Security Agency report.

Senator Stone strode into the committee room during the second week of hearings on the strategic arms treaty signed with the Soviet Union in June. He asked Defense Secretary Harold Brown, who had prepared himself thoroughly on the treaty, but not on Cuba, what he knew about a Soviet brigade.

Perplexed, Mr. Brown replied that he was not aware of a change of Soviet military activities in Cuba. Pressed by Mr. Stone and by Senator Frank Church, the Idaho Democrat who heads the committee, Mr. Brown authorized them to issue a statement saying that aside from a military advisory group, "our intelligence does not warrant the conclusion that there are any other significant Soviet military forces in Cuba." The report was virtually lost in the welter of press accounts dealing with the Carter Cabinet and the treaty deliberations.

But Senator Stone was not satisfied. The next day, he asked Vice President Mondale to increase surveillance of Cuba, a request that was passed on to the intelligence community.

This represented the third increase in surveillance since spring, after a call by the National Security Council in March for an estimate of Soviet ground forces in Cuba, and Mr. Brzezinski's April request for a more general report on Soviet-Cuban relationships.

Asked today why the Carter Administration had not focused a year ago on the intelligence reports of a "brigade" instead of many months later, a White House official said, "We were interested at the time, but they were just snippets and later there was a larger accumulation of information."

Florida Senator Persists

Senator Stone, whose state lies 90 miles from Cuba at Key West, the closest point, continued to press for results, writing to President Carter on July 24.

Yet even though the intelligence accumulation on the Soviet combat force was building up, Senator Stone was advised in a letter from Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance on July 27, at the direction of President Carter, that "our intelligence does not warrant the conclusion that there are significant Soviet forces in Cuba."

Senator Stone immediately termed this "a whitewash."

A second letter from the Senator to the President on Aug. 10 appears to have had the effect of spurring still more intense technical surveillance of Cuba. In any case, Mr. Carter ordered "the highest priority" of reconnaissance about this time, the fourth increase since March, and the one that finally paid off with the decisive radio interception and the maneuver photograph.

But again, the Administration appears to have had difficulty translating its intelligence into useful political action.

Stone Gets Phone Call

By Aug. 24, exactly a week after the maneuver photograph of the troops was taken, an interagency task force concluded that the Soviet brigade did exist and was indeed a combat unit with a known command structure. David D. Newsom, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, called Senator Stone in Tampa, Fla., to tell him he was prepared to brief him on his "assertions" about the brigade.

The Senator said in an interview that he begged off, saying he did not want to be briefed "on the telephone" and would prefer to hear Mr. Newsom's account on his return to Washington after Labor Day. He also recalls that he spent part of the day in Florida with President Carter, who, incidentally, had been briefed about the brigade's maneuver the day before, but that the President never raised the subject.

The State Department was content to let matters stand as they were, a high-ranking Administration official said, until after Congress returned to Washington Sept. 4. That was the day Mr. Newsom set for briefing Senator Stone.

But on Aug. 21 the National Intelligence Daily, an Administration document widely circulated in the Government and Congress mentioned the brigade maneuver. Two days later, a copy evidently came into the hands of Aviation Week & Space Technology, whose editors began calling Administration officials for confirmation.

Quandary for Administration

This put the Administration in the position of having the information appear in the press before key members of Congress could be briefed.

As a result, the State Department leadership decided to call Senator Church, who had issued the July 17 statement on the strength of Harold Brown's authority that there was no Soviet brigade in Cuba. On Aug. 30, Mr. Newsom reached Senator Church in Idaho and told him what was known. Senator Church then called Secretary Vance and Senator Stone saying he was going to make it public.

However, Senator Church stunned Secretary Vance and other Administration officials by coupling the disclosure with the demand that the Soviet Union remove the brigade, a public ultimatum with which the Administration and the Soviet Union are still wrestling.

"It's all political now," a senior intelligence official said today with a sigh and a thin smile of relief. "We've done our job."